

Mr. Bryan's Baltimore Speeches

PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRACY

The People's Pillar of Fire by Night; Their Pillar of Cloud by Day

Mr. Bryan's speech at Baltimore, June 25, 1912, opposing the election of Alton B. Parker as temporary chairman of the democratic national convention:

Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the convention: I rise to place in nomination for the office of temporary chairman of this convention Hon. John W. Kern of Indiana. In thus dissenting from the judgment of our national committee, as expressed in its recommendation, I recognize that the burden of proof is upon me to overthrow the presumption that the committee is representing the wishes of this convention and of the party of the nation.

I call your attention to the fact that our rules declare that the recommendation of the committee is not final. The very fact that this convention has the right to accept or reject that recommendation is conclusive proof that the presumption in favor of this convention is a higher presumption than that in favor of the wisdom of the committee.

If any of you ask me for my credentials; if any of you inquire why I, a mere delegate to this convention from one of the smaller states, should presume to present a name, and ask you to accept it in place of the name it presented, I beg to tell you, if it needs to be told, that in three campaigns I have been the champion of the democratic party's principles, and that in three campaigns I have received the votes of six millions and a half of democrats. If that is not proof that I have the confidence of the party of this nation I shall not attempt to furnish proof.

I remind you, also, that confidence reposed in a human being carries with it certain responsibilities, and I would not be worthy of the confidence and the affection that have been showered upon me by the democrats of this nation if I were not willing to risk humiliation in their defense.

I recognize that a man can not carry on a political warfare in defense of the mass of the people for sixteen years without making enemies; I know full well that there has been no day since the day I was nominated in Chicago when these enemies have not been industrious in their efforts to attack me from every standpoint.

The fact that I have lived is proof that I have not deserted the people. If for a moment I had forgotten them, they would not have remembered me.

I take for my text the quotation that someone has been kind enough to place upon the walls for my use. "He never sold the truth to serve the hour." That is the language of the hero of New Orleans, and I would not deserve the support I have received if I were willing to sell the truth to serve the present hour.

We are told by those who support the committee's recommendation that it is disturbing harmony to oppose their conclusions. Let me free myself from any criticism that any one may have made heretofore or may attempt hereafter. Is there any delegate in this body of more than ten hundred who tried earlier than I to secure harmony in this convention?

I began several weeks ago. I announced to the sub-committee that I would not be a candidate for temporary chairman.

I might have asked, without presumption, that at the end of sixteen years of battle when I find the things I have fought for not only triumphant in my own party but even in the republican party—under these conditions I might have asked, I repeat, the modest honor of standing before this convention and voicing the rejoicing of my party. But I was more interested in harmony than I was in speaking to the convention. Not only that, but I advised this committee to consult the two leading candidates, the men who together have nearly two-thirds of this convention instructed for them—I asked the committee to consult these two men and get their approval of a man for chairman that there might be no contest in this convention.

What suggestion could I have then made more in the interest of harmony than to ask this committee to allow two-thirds of this convention a voice in the selection of its temporary chairman?

In the discussion before the sub-committee, the friends of Mr. Clark and Mr. Wilson were

not able to agree; one supported Mr. James and the other supported Mr. Henry, but in the full committee last night the friends of Mr. Wilson joined with the friends of Mr. Clark in the support of Mr. James, Mr. Clark's choice, and yet the committee turned down the joint request thus made.

I submit to you that the plan that I presented—the plan that I followed—was a plan for the securing of harmony; and that the plan which the committee followed was not designed to secure harmony.

Let me for a moment present the qualifications of one fitted for this position. This is no ordinary occasion. This is an epoch-making convention. We have had such a struggle as was never seen in politics before. I have been in the center of this fight and I know something of the courage that it has brought forth, and something of the sacrifice that has been required.

I know men working upon the railroad for small wages with but little laid up for their declining years who have disobeyed the railroad managers and helped us in this progressive fight at the risk of having their bread and butter taken from them.

I know men engaged in business and carrying loans at banks who have been threatened with bankruptcy if they did not sell their citizenship, and yet I have seen these men defy those who threatened them and walk up and vote on the side of the struggling masses against predatory wealth.

I have seen lawyers risking their future, by alienating men of large business, in order to be the champions of the poor. I have seen men who had never made a speech before go out and devote weeks of time to public speaking because their hearts were stirred.

It is only fair that now, when the hour of triumph has come, the song of victory should be sung by one whose heart has been in the fight. John W. Kern has been faithful every day in these sixteen years. It has cost him time, it has cost him money and it has cost him the wear of body and of mind. He has been giving freely of all that he had. Four years ago, when the foundation was laid for the present victory, it was John W. Kern who stood with me and helped to bring into the campaign the idea of publicity before the election that has now swept the country until even the republican party was compelled by public opinion to give it unanimous indorsement only a few weeks ago.

It was John W. Kern who stood with me on that Denver platform that demanded the election of senators by direct vote of the people, when a republican national convention had turned it down by a vote of seven to one, and now he is in the United States senate, where he is measuring up to the high expectations of a great party.

He helped in the fight for the amendment authorizing an income tax, and he has lived to see a president who was opposed to us take that plank out of our platform and put it through the senate and house and to see thirty-four states of the union ratify it. And now he is leading the fight in the United States senate to purge that body of Senator Lorimer, who typifies the supremacy of corruption in politics.

What better man could we have to open a convention?

What better man could we have to represent the spirit of progressive democracy?

Contrast the candidate presented by the committee with the candidate whom I present, and it can be done without impeaching his character or his good intent. Not every one of high character and good intent is a fit man to sound the keynote of a progressive campaign.

There are seven millions of republicans in this country, or were at the last election, and I have never doubted that a large majority of them were men of high character and good intent, but we would not invite one of them to be temporary chairman of our convention. We have a great many democrats who vote the ticket after it is nominated, who are not in full sympathy with the purposes of the party.

They emphasize the fact that Judge Parker supported me in 1908, but I assume that no friend of Judge Parker will contend that he was entirely satisfied with either the candidate or the plans and purposes of our party.

I not only voted the ticket in 1904, but I made speeches for the candidate when I was not at all satisfied with either the candidate or the influences that nominated him and directed the

campaign, but the reactionaries did not ask me to act as temporary chairman of the St. Louis convention, although I had then been twice a candidate for president.

This is not a time when personal ambitions or personal compliments should be considered. We are writing history today, and this convention is to announce to the country whether it will take up the challenge thrown down at Chicago by a convention controlled by predatory wealth, or put ourselves under the same control and give the people no party to represent them.

We need not deceive ourselves with the thought that that which is done in a national convention is done in secret.

If every member of this convention entered into an agreement of secrecy we would still act under the eyes of these representatives of the press, who know not only what we do, but why we do it.

The delegates of this convention must not presume upon the ignorance of those who did not come, either because they had not influence enough to be elected delegates or money enough to pay the expenses of the trip, but who have as much interest in the party's welfare as we who speak for them today.

These people will know that the influences that dominated the convention at Chicago and made its conclusions a farce are here and more brazenly at work than they were at Chicago.

I appeal to you; let the commencement of this convention be such that the democrats of this country may raise their heads among their fellows and say: The democratic party is true to the people. You can not frighten it with your Ryans, nor buy it with your Belmonts.

If the candidate proposed by the committee were an unknown man we would judge him by the forces that are back of him, and not by you, gentlemen, who may try to convince yourselves that you owe it to the committee to sustain its action even though you believe it made a mistake.

But that is not the question. We know who the candidate is, as well as the men behind him. We know that he is the man who was selected as the party candidate eight years ago when the democratic party, beaten in two campaigns, decided that it was worth while to try to win a campaign under the leadership of those who had defeated us in the campaigns before.

The democrats of the country have not forgotten that that convention was influenced by the promise of large campaign funds from Wall street, and they have not forgotten the fact that after corporation management had alienated the rank and file of the party, Wall street threw the party down and elected the republican candidate.

They have not forgotten that when the vote was counted we had a million and a quarter less votes than we had in the two campaigns before, and a million and a quarter less than we had four years afterward. They have not forgotten that it is the same man, backed by the same influence, who is to be forced on this convention to open a progressive campaign with a paralyzing speech that will dishearten the fighting force of the party.

You ask me how I know, without reading it, that that speech would not be satisfactory. A speech is not so many words; it is the man and not the words that make a speech.

We have been passing through a great educational age; around the world the democratic movement has been sweeping all obstacles before it. In Russia emancipated serfs have secured the right to a voice in their government. In Persia the people have secured a constitution. In Turkey the man who was in danger every hour of being cast into prison without an indictment, or beheaded without a charge against him, now has some influence in the moulding of the laws. China, the sleeping giant of the orient, has risen from a slumber of two thousand years and today is a republic waiting for recognition. And in Great Britain the people have asserted their independence of the house of lords.

And while the outside world has been marching at double-quick in the direction of more complete freedom our nation has kept step; on no other part of God's footstool has popular government grown more rapidly than here. In every state the fight has been waged. The man whom I present has been the leader of the progressive cause in his state, and once joint leader in the nation.

I challenge you to find in sixteen years where the candidate presented by the committee has, before a nomination was made, gone out and rendered effective service in behalf of any man